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ABSTRACT

Library Technical Assistant (LTA) programs were developed in the 1950's and 1960's to train a new class of library employees. With the encouragement of the American Library Association, many such programs have been started in the community colleges of the United States since 1965. Work/study courses, skills laboratories, media tracks, flexible scheduling, and accepted syllabi are among the recent innovations in LTA training. The results of a study of LTA programs in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Arizona are presented briefly. (Author/PF)

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LIBRARY TECHNICAL ASSISTANT PROGRAMS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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INTRODUCTION

For many years it was generally agreed that there was a shortage of professionally trained librarians in the United States (Allen, 1:83). It was not until the late 1960s that the graduate library schools were able to provide a sufficient number of professional librarians. In a similar fashion, the need for supportive personnel was as acute (Library Technology ..., 11:4). As libraries became more complicated with new indexing techniques and new equipment, there was an increasing need for technically trained support personnel to keep the services working. In-service education programs in large libraries assisted only those who worked in those libraries. In response to the needs of institutions and constitutents of the community, several junior colleges started to develop library technology programs. The growth and innovations in the community college programs is the focus of this paper.

The library technical assistant (LTA) is the recently accepted term to describe someone whose "duties are based on skills required by the library clerk, but, in addition, a proficiency developed in one or more functional areas or in certain limited phases of library service." (A.L.A. L.E.D. "The Subprofessional ..., 3:183). Another definition from an educational point of view states that a LTA is a "para-professional library worker whose duties require knowledge and skills based

on a minimum of two college years including what is academically referred to as "General Education" plus formal and informal library instruction." (Shores, 16:3). In the overall personnel scheme for supportive staff, the LTA is not a page who mainly shelves books or a clerk who mainly performs common business practices or a library assistant who has a college degree or a student assistant.

In a library, an LTA might work in technical services, readers' services, and audiovisual services. The jobs in a technical service area may include assisting in ordering, preparing, and maintaining library materials, files and records. In addition, the LTA may catalog some library material and supervise clerical and student workers. The duties in the readers' services area may include assisting patrons in the use of the card catalog and other basic library resources and helping with the loaning of material. The assignments in the audiovisual services area may include creating displays and instructional materials as well as maintaining audiovisual equipment (Chernik, 6:352).

The employment opportunities are varied and available. An LTA can work in school, university, public, and special libraries. "The employment outlook is excellent through the 1970s for library technicians in the rapidly growing field." (Baker, 5:4). In 1970, "library technical assistant salaries in metropolitan areas range[d] from $5,200 to $8,500 a year and in small towns and small libraries from $3,800 to $5,500." (The Library Technical ..., 10:8).

HISTORY

Community colleges saw the need for providing training as early as 1949. Palomar Junior College in 1949, Citrus College in 1955, and Los Angeles Trade-Technical College in 1958 were some of the first 2-year schools to offer courses (Allen, 1:87). However, the growth in the number of programs was slow.

In 1965, the Martinson report (13) brought attention to the meager programs (Allen, 1:87). In 1966, the American Library Association established a committee to study the programs. As a rule, librarians were enthusiastic about the programs (The Library Technical ..., 10:3). However, "there (were) many difficulties in obtaining recognition for the library technical training programs and graduates of the programs, and in different sections of the United States there continue to be variations in the degree to which library technical assistants are accepted." (Allen, 1:89).

Despite opposition, the number of programs in the U. S. has increased dramatically from 20 programs in 1965 to 118 programs in 1971 (Grego, 9:1). As a move toward standardization, the recent LTA programs have been developed in accordance with the 1969 American Library Association Criteria (2). The growth in the number of programs is expected to continue, but not nearly as fast as in the latter 1960s.

CURRICULUM

When one takes a macro-view of the curricula, one notices a similarity on one level and a difference on another. Most

programs attempt to provide instruction in a practical, fundamental way on work commonalities in libraries. Some programs try to do this in two courses and others require six. The difference is apparent in the amount of instruction including on-the-job training which is available in community colleges.

The American Library Association's Criteria (2) which was endorsed by the American Association of Junior Colleges suggests the steps a college could follow in order to develop an educational program. Acceptable programs should have an advisory committee, a full-time administrator, adequate financial support, a well-equipped college library, and qualified instructors (ALA. LED. "Criteria ..., 2:256-257). The curriculum should be based on behavioral objectives. General education courses should constitute 50% of the program. Courses related to business and office skills such as typing, data processing, and office machines should occupy 25% and the last 25% for speciality courses in library technology. These courses should include an introduction to libraries and an introduction to support services in the areas of public services, technical services, and audio-visual services. Laboratory experience should be included along with practical and supervised field work in local libraries (ALA. LED. "Criteria ..., 2:257).

Several states notably California and Texas have established their own guidelines for library technology programs. The Tex-Tec Syllabi (Shores, 16) was prepared for the Texas State Library in 1968 by a committee of well-known librarians

and educators. Its purpose is to "provide a standard course of training library technicians and offer it to interested academic institutions." (Shores, 16:2). The course of training should include (1a) library use (2 units), (1b) the LTA (1 unit), (2) technical services assistance (3 units), (3) public services assistance (3 units), (4) media assistance (3 units), and (5) field work (3 units) (Shores, 16:8). The useful aspect of the Tex-Tec Syllabi (16) is that it gives the course of study for the five courses. Since few textbooks are available to the teacher, this is very helpful.

Concerning instruction, Tex-Tec Syllabi suggests the use of local resources and specialized studies in conjunction with graphic aids. Innovative approaches are suggested which go beyond the "basic lecture, discussion, conference, and other conventional but solid devises. Some of these 'frontiers' are suggested by the contemporary electronic--automation captivation; others by the trend to independent study." (Shores, 16:9). Another innovative suggestion concerns a skills laboratory or a demonstration library. It could be used for independent study, observation and practice by students.

In California, the Office of the Chancellor of community colleges produced a set of guideline and course content similar to the Texas guidelines. Besides suggesting how colleges can develop a LTA program, the Chancellor's guidelines outline five core courses and several optional courses to enhance the curriculum. The core courses and educational program resemble the

Texas and ALA guidelines. However, the California program puts more emphasis on audio-visual courses and includes an optional course in children's librarianship. (The Library Technical ..., 10:12-13).

SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

Many states have excellent examples of desirable library technology programs. The writer examined two programs in Illinois, one in Wisconsin, and two in Arizona.

The library technology program in Wisconsin is offered at a 2-year technical institute. It started in 1968 and has been successful in placing the graduates. The curriculum does not vary much from the Tex-Tec Syllabi (16). (Chernik, 6:350-352).

An associate in applied science degree is offered at Illinois Central College, East Peoria for successful completion of the library technology program. "To qualify for admission the student must be a high school graduate and in good physical health. Students who do not wish to take the degree program may take only the library and audiovisual courses." (Allen, 1:95).

The other school in Illinois is Thornton Community College in Harvey. At this school, an associate degree for an educational media technician program is offered. Educational media programs in community colleges are an off-shoot of library technology programs and are a result of the dramatic increase in audio-visual equipment and materials in libraries and schools. (Allen, 1:96).

In Arizona, the only school which offers a bona fide LTA program is Mesa Community College. The design and purpose is similar to other community college programs. The groundwork for the program started with a curriculum committee in 1965. (DePriest, 8:45). After considerable research and travel, a committee of faculty and librarians from Maricopa County was formed to study the feasibility of a program and the research results. The committee approved a program which was later approved by the Maricopa County and Arizona State Junior College Borards. (DePriest, 8:48). The program officially began in 1967 and is still going strong.

Mr. Thomas Templeton is chairman and Mrs.Jeanette DePriest is coordinator. Professional librarians from Arizona State University and Mesa Community College are the teachers. The curriculum resembles the previous discussed programs. One innovation is when the courses are taught. They meet in the evening. When the core courses are completed along with four physical education credits, six English credits, 12 to 16 credits in behavioral, cultural, social or quantitative science, and nine credits of related electives, the student is eligible for an Associate of Arts degree (Mesa ..., 14:76).

The other Arizona college is Arizona Western which offers a Teacher-Librarian Aide curriculum designed for school libraries (Arizona ..., 4:76). Only two courses are offered.

SUMMARY

LTA programs have grown and developed to train a new class of library employees. Even though most programs are similar and fairly young, they have made innovations and improvements a common goal. Quality work/study courses, skills laboratories, media tracks, flexible scheduling, and accepted syllabi are some of the concepts that did not exist in the 1950s and early 1960s.

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